

BOOK REVIEWS

The Biographical Dictionary of the Australian Senate, Volume 3, 1962–1983

Ann Millar and Geoffrey Browne (eds) (UNSW Press, Kensington, 2010,

ISBN 9780868409962, 712 pp.)

This volume is the third volume of a series that commemorates the lives and work of those whose service in the Australian Senate concluded between 1962 and 1983. It contains articles on 104 Senators and four Clerks. The 104 Senators include all six Democratic Labor Party (DLP) Senators and also a number of women, including the redoubtable Annabelle Rankin the first female Queensland Senator and first woman minister in the Senate. The entries were written by a number of different contributors who range from officers of the Senate and political scientists to, in some cases, staff members of the Senator in question.

Pleasingly this volume has kept the very useful format of its two predecessors namely a useful list of references for each entry and a very comprehensive index. In addition this format includes photographs of the Senators and clerks which appear at the head of each entry, together with their party affiliation and a summary of their service on parliamentary committees and ministerial appointments. As with volume two, entries are arranged according to states in reverse alphabetical order with the difference of Victoria first and Western Australia last. It is assumed that in later volumes each state will have a turn at being first in the respective volume.

The blurb on the dust jacket of this volume reminds its readers that the Senators in this volume served ‘during a period of rapid social and political change’. This change included the introduction of proportional representation in 1949 with the subsequent result that it was harder for a party to obtain an absolute majority in the Senate. Other significant changes during this period included a rise in independent and minor party Senators and the growth of the Senate committee system including the

all important and well-known estimates committees.

The biographies of a number of very significant and colourful Senators appear in the pages of this volume, for example Lionel Murphy, Alister McMullin, Frank McManus and Jim Keefe. Very pleasingly, the entries do not end with the expiration of the Senator’s period of service. Brian Stevenson’s entry on Vince Gair, as an example, gives a candid appraisal of Gair’s service as Ambassador to Ireland, ‘as Ambassador, Gair left a lot to be desired’. The Gair entry is quite lengthy (over eight pages). By comparison, Gair’s entry in the Australian Dictionary of Biography is three pages. A biographical dictionary of this specialised nature, should not skimp on quality or detail, and this one does not.

However, the entry on Gair’s colleague Condon Byrne seems to be missing something, it is good on biographical material but poor on analysis. This may be not surprising as Byrne was the least well known of the six DLP Senators. But Byrne’s contribution to the debate on Senate Privilege on 26 August 1971 gives a real indication of the nature of the man, his sense of fair play both in himself and for others and his methodical speaking and debating style. That debate also showed Byrne’s desire for natural justice.

The entry for Alister McMullin, the longest serving Senate president is instructive, reasons are given as to why McMullin became President of the Senate defeating his party colleague Mattner from South Australia, and one can see the influence of Menzies. The biographer describes McMullin as the prefect ‘party strategist’ (p. 395). The term party strategist is then defined ‘amiable and urbane, with a distinguished presence, and generating an aura of

fair-mindedness'. A deficiency in this biography is that there is no mention of how McMullin operated within the Liberal Party itself with the party faithful and the non-parliamentary party hierarchy. However, overall, this biographical entry is an entertaining and informative account. It gives the reader an appreciation of the factors that make a Senate president tick.

Lionel Murphy had already been the subject of numerous books and papers before the publication of this biographical dictionary. However this entry gives a good account of Murphy's work in the Senate, some of which seems to have been overshadowed by his work on the Bench of the High Court of Australia. An example is Murphy's role in the genesis of the new Senate committee system, which has been described as his 'most significant achievement in the cause of parliamentary reform'. Murphy had 'a disdain for caution'.

The interaction of a Senate minister with various interest groups and having to represent a number of House of Representatives ministers in the Senate are key features in the entry for Senator G.C. McKellar. The relationship McKellar had as Minister for Repatriation with the Returned and Services League (RSL) is described, along with McKellar's visits to Australian soldiers in Vietnam (often over the Christmas period).

McKellar represented the Minister for Air in the Senate at the time of the VIP flights controversy. McKellar telling the Senate that 'it was not his place to justify the actions of the Minister for Air'. McKellar was described as 'an aggressive fighter for the principles he held to be true'. A description which would be quite true of most Senators.

Albert Patrick Field's entry tells the story of a man appointed to the Senate to fill a casual vacancy in a method that is no longer in use after a successful referendum to amend the Constitution. It was only a 'convention' that Senators were to be replaced by a nominee from their own party and not by even an 'ex' party member. The entry of Field details some of the angst and resentment which that appointment created, given that Field was 'known to be strong opponent of the Whitlam Government'.

The entry for James Patrick Ormonde gives a good comprehensive account of a varied career in Labor politics. Ormonde a devout Catholic stayed with the Australian Labor Party (ALP) after the 1955 split notwithstanding that he had a role in the setting up of the Industrial Groups. In fact Ormonde latter strongly opposed the Groups because of their 'relentless pursuit of power' and their 'single minded anti-communism'.

In respect of Senator Condor Lauke from South Australia readers are told that Lauke actively promoted the industries of South Australia and that as President of the Senate he insisted on wearing the traditional wig and gown because 'they lent authority to the office and was in keeping with the Westminster tradition'. Significantly 'Lauke's name was considered synonymous with politeness and trust, which lent respect to the institution of Parliament'. Lauke also once commented 'there's never any need to be nasty to anyone'. This entry is useful in illustrating an Australian Senate that is different in terms of composition and make up to the Australian Senate of recent years. While the Senate of the Lauke presidency was very polite and diplomatic, the modern Senate is much more adversarial and combative in its style of operating, along with the debating style, Senate Estimates are now much more gladiatorial.

In conclusion, this volume is a very significant addition to the literature on the Australian Senate. It will be a valuable work of reference for those who wish to discover more about those who served as Senators in a period of great change.

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Tradition and Public Administration

Martin Painter and B. Guy Peters (eds)
(Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2010,
ISBN 9780230575660, 274 pp.)

In an era of reform, it may seem perverse to be investigating administrative traditions.

However, as Painter and Peters argue in their conclusion to this well-structured and informative collection, administrative traditions constitute the DNA of national public sectors. These traditions play an important role in shaping management and the relationship to politics, and in understanding them, we gain a more nuanced appreciation of the trajectories and constraints of change.

For students of comparative public administration, there is much to savour in the book. I particularly enjoyed the coverage of the lesser-known traditions – from Cheung's chapter on China; Diwvedi and Mishra's coverage of Indian public administration; to Huque on Bangladesh; and Hyden on Africa. There are also useful summative chapters on the more familiar English-speaking nations.

Even in a book of this scope, however, there will be inevitable omissions and imbalances. For an Australian reader, the lack of coverage of South-East Asia (and Indonesia in particular) is unfortunate. To an extent, this no doubt reflects the availability of authors: let us hope that the diverse administrative traditions of these countries will receive more attention in future editions of this work. Latin American nations also miss out on detailed attention. A country like Chile, which has changed (and suffered) so much in administrative terms would make a fascinating subject.

In organising their comparative approach, the editors adopt the families of nations framework championed by earlier comparativists such as Frank Castles. In their wide-ranging Chapter Two, they detect nine administrative traditions – ranging from the Anglo-American and various European traditions, through to more speculative categories, such as Islamic, Soviet and Postcolonial regimes. This group-based approach is, as Painter and Peters explain, very much a work in progress, with inevitable difficulties in classifying to a common group countries which, on closer inspection, turn out to more different than one might have imagined.

A particular manifestation of this problem occurs with the 'Napoleonic' countries (France, Spain and other southern European countries).

Ongaro's chapter battles gamely with the task of discussing under the same rubric nations as different from each other as Greece and France. But in this application at least, the 'lens' of administrative tradition seems to cloud over somewhat.

By contrast, observing 'trajectories of change' within the one country proves more fruitful, bringing out the importance both of ideas and structural (institutional) variables in understanding the role of tradition. Interestingly, this emphasis on the normative aspects of administrative tradition ties in with recent work of my own on the importance of values in understanding change.¹ Yesilkagit's view (Chapter 11) that administrative traditions work through ideas and beliefs, as well as being encoded within structures, provides a useful way of visualising these interactions.

It is instructive, in this context, to compare Painter's chapter on Japan in the current volume with Krauss's chapter on the same country in the 1995 comparative collection edited by Jon Pierre.² Krauss's approach, while historically contextualised, in focusing on Japanese bureaucracy, gives an essentially structuralist account of relationships within and between the ruling elite. Painter's chapter, on the other hand, emphasises the tensions experienced by the Japanese in re-modernising their administration in the post Second World War period, given the earlier hybridisation of the Meiji era. As we might expect, focusing on administrative traditions gives a stronger sense of the value-conflicts inherent in change.

So, how have the varied traditions covered in the book fared in an age of reform? In the case of the former communist regimes of eastern Europe, the answer is unexpected. In these countries, reform involves creating or recreating the traditions that new public management, at least in its Australian incarnation, has done so much to dismantle: professional neutrality; organisational expertise; and the existence of some form of tenure as a bulwark against the political. 'Reform' clearly depends upon where you are starting from.

Overall, Painter and Peters endorse the view expressed by Pollitt and Bouckaert – that the

way change happens is affected by the past.³ But how these effects occur, at least in relation to the process of change, is mediated by many specific factors. It is difficult to say that some countries will be 'better' at change because of the type of administrative history they have. The authors' conclusion (p.237) is judicious 'traditions are important, and they do affect outcomes, but they need to be understood as one of several factors affecting the ways in which contemporary States are governed'.

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Notes:

1. Stewart, J. 2009. *Public Policy Values*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
2. Pierre, J. ed. 1995. *Bureaucracy in the Modern State: An Introduction to Comparative Public Administration*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
3. Pollitt, C. and G. Bouckaert, 2004. *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis*. Second Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

What Were They Thinking: The Politics of Ideas in Australia

James Walter with Tod Moore (UNSW Press, Sydney, 2010, ISBN 9780868409719, 384 pp.)

This engaging study, by James Walter with Tod Moore, offers a comprehensive survey of Australian political life. So far as I am aware, there is no better overview of unfolding circumstances or of the ideas through which their meanings were interpreted. It joins a précis of issues and developments to the ideas that mediated their resolution. Along the way, it also covers ideas that reflected alternative socio-political ambitions – but were still-born, unable to persuade a sufficiently broad public.

Walter's account runs from the inception of Australian political life until the global financial crisis. The latter event introduces and closes the volume. It perhaps also underlines a parallel between the 19th and early 21st centuries. Both seem marked by the absence of alternative socioeconomic visions – as now, the free trade/protection divide was a narrow division, about means more than ends, and one that failed to encompass many major issues.

Through some 350 pages, four substantive parts and 11 chapters the story of Australia's political choices and conflicts is deftly retold. One notable feature of this study is its citations. The authors have engaged extensively and impressively with the literature on Australian development from Wentworth, Lang and Deniehy, through Deakin and Reid, the new liberals of the 1920s and 1930s, laborists, postwar reconstructionists, the new left of the 1960s and protagonists for the neo-liberal turn of the 1980s.

The study eschews any overarching interpretive frame. Walter explicitly gives primacy to the way 'our subjects conceived of their political projects themselves, and these are what I am concerned to recover'. The first substantial part of the study, labelled 'Democracy by degrees', explores the 60 or so years from the agitation for self government in the 1840s, to its arrival in 1856 and its unfolding through the 19th century culminating in Federation in 1901. The Georgian ideals of government espoused by the large land owners were quickly displaced by Chartist and Cobdenite norms. Peter Cochrane's wonderful account of the agitations and conflicts of this period, *Colonial Ambition*, is generously cited. However the democratic settlement left substantial veto powers in the hands of the land owners and this created a base for subsequent political conflict.

The second chapter in this section explores some of the major intellectual currents that emerged in this period and which framed post Federation developments – radical or social liberalism, an emerging working class movement, the development of urban life, and the various social movements of the later 19th century,

culminating in the nationalism that helped drive Federation. The authors also usefully point in this and later sections to the media through which the various currents in civil society were expressed and renewed – for example, the early universities and the scholars who populated them, the media (particularly David Syme's *Age* and *The Bulletin*), pamphlets, utopian novels and journals.

The second major section traces the next 40 years from Federation through to the Second World War. The burst of optimism and legislative creativity associated with the first decade of the 20th century quickly gave way to the horrors of the First World War and the more unsettled civil order that followed it. A minority embraced revolutionary hopes, the Labor elite toyed with socialism, but the mainstream stuck to more sober and orthodox liberal attachments. What the authors engagingly described as Cobdenite populism emerged early in the century in the Kyabram movement and it became a template for a variety of such upsurges in the 1920s and 1930s. More extreme formations were nourished by the collapse of order in the depression.

The new liberalism of the 1920s and 1930s was however the dominant intellectual pulse – the work of Eccleston, Hancock, Bland, etc. is discussed along with the emergence of economists and economic thinking to occupy a dominant place in Australian public policy. This period also saw the establishment of institutes like the Australian Institute of Policy and Science (AIPS) and the Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA), and the development and consolidation of intellectual communities via the *Economic Record*, this present journal and its analogues.

The third major section explores the decisive shifts that occurred during and after the Second World War. Externally, the war resulted in a new orientation to the United States and the beginning of a gradual separation from Britain. Internally, a large scale non-Anglo migration program was inaugurated post-War, plus national development and welfare programs on a grand scale. The ambitions of Labor to mediate a more state-led postwar order were displaced

by Robert Menzies, who built the Liberal party as a potent political force. But the programs that he espoused were wholly in the social liberal register. This section then marches through the cultural upheavals of the 1970s and the new issues – environmentalism, feminism, indigenous, ethnic, and gay rights for example – that then emerged.

Finally, our authors turn to the economic crisis of the global order of the 1970s and its resolution in post-1983 neo-liberalism. In the process, the two parties lost their programmatic differences and with that one of the principal justifications for the party system of which they were the standard bearers. Meantime, this study had opened with a discussion of Kevin Rudd's surely ephemeral essay on neo-liberalism. It concludes with a reflection on the possible trajectories of policy beyond the global financial crisis. Whether the 2010 election is a harbinger of deeper political change remains an open question.

In seeking to allow the participants to speak in their own voice, Walter deliberately puts aside other interpretive frames that have been proposed to order our experience, for example: Australia as a settler society; or a Benthamite/utilitarian community; or as a patriarchy; or the Foucaultian governmentality thesis. In the end however he cannot avoid his own ordering principle, namely: 'though our interest in and engagement with politics might be driven by ideals – democracy, equal opportunity, liberty, choice, self determination, justice – the fundamental determinant of political reasoning is economic. Ideas that do not carry with them an answer to the problem of resource allocation – who gets what when and how – are marginalised'.

I wonder. At one level, this actually seems a utilitarian and Benthamite reading of Australian political culture. Is this consonant even with the story we have just surveyed? There is for example, the idealism of the self-government movement, the romanticism of the nineties, and the ethos of social liberalism and labourism. The ethical sources of the latter extend well beyond immediate material concerns, assuming that such ever exist outside a social

construction. The Cobdenite versions of liberalism, for all their individualism, envisage a society-wide unfolding of beneficent intent. Via a state-mediated society of mutual benefit, violence, knavery and faction were to be transfigured. The scepticism of the early Enlightenment about the variability of human dispositions, including ineradicable malefaction, was displaced in the later Enlightenment. Via a levelling of desires and social mechanics, beneficence could be generalised. This, through its several versions, was the liberal faith. The description of our country as a Commonwealth also gestures beyond any narrow individualism.

So how is Australian political culture to be conceived? Perhaps as one in which the Enlightenment orientation to ordinary life creates a primary horizon, but also one in which beneficence is assumed and mutuality is the lodestar. Perhaps also, beyond the utilitarian frame, a wider range and more complex structure of feeling is germane to politics and can be invoked to extend and adapt political boundaries.

Take the recent past. The social movements of the 1970s surely reflect such pulses. There is arguably an omnipresent romantic strain in Australian political culture which periodically bursts through a hardly uniform liberal surface. Looking back to a convict settlement and the resistance to democracy in the 1830s and 1840s, perhaps also a Georgian component – but its elements draw as much from the images of Hogarth as from those of Edmund Burke or Jane Austin. A project to measure Australian civic life without the varieties of liberalism and without giving due weight to Georgian and Romantic currents seems too limited.

Further, in a study of political ideas, the contribution of Australian authors to the social movements of the 1970s surely deserves more attention. Four Australians – Germaine Greer (1970), Dennis Altman (1971), Peter Singer (1975) and Helen Caldicott (1978) – wrote the books that were seminal for the international women's, gay, animal liberation and anti-nuclear movements. Although unacknowledged in their own country, from a political per-

spective, these authors are arguably the most significant Australians of the past half century. Their originality challenges the imitativeness of much domestic politics, which this present study also highlights.

These qualifications are hardly limitations, but rather points for further scholarly attention. This book is valuable in its own right and valuable in an age in which agency figures so prominently in social analysis. This comprehensive survey of agency in Australian political life shows a diversity that is richer and a range that is wider than is perhaps sufficiently acknowledged. It also suggests avenues for further exploration. For example, are there many other instances of pure post-Enlightenment societies? What is then distinctive about the Australian example? This study represents James Walter's latest contribution to his distinguished engagement with such enlarging questions.

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The State at Work: Volume 1 Public Sector Employment in Ten Western Countries

Hans-Ulrich Derlien and B. Guy Peters (eds)
(Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 2008, ISBN 9781843765165, 297 pp.)

The State at Work: Volume 2 Comparative Public Service Systems

Hans-Ulrich Derlien and B. Guy Peters (eds)
(Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 2008, ISBN 9781843765172, 229 pp.)

This two-volume collection provides an analysis of public sector employment in 10 countries, including Australia. A core of 11 authors are involved in both volumes, and assorted others contribute to specific chapters. The first volume addresses country systems, the second several dimensions of employment. The basis for selection is structure and political culture. They cover five European (Denmark,

France, Germany, Spain and Sweden) and five Anglo-American (Australia, Britain, Canada, New Zealand and the United States) systems, and an equal number of federal and unitary systems. The purpose is to map and take stock of OECD public services, taking into account the impact of New Public Management, the expansions and contractions, cross-country comparisons, and fundamental dimensions of the concept of the state.

The 10 country chapters in Volume 1 feature a strong list of authors, who use a sub-title to signal a defining feature for their country while following the project template covering historical development, changes among government levels, different types of employment (including part-time and female), public service groups and the influence of New Public Management (NPM) reforms. For readers seeking comparative insights there are many to be acquired. For example, there is the ambiguity about public sector employment in Britain, hence Brian Hogwood's sub-title 'from working in to working for the public sector?' The chapter on Australia by the late Helen Nelson analyses the trends in the latter part of the 20th century, including the impacts of privatisation and contracting out.

Derlien's concluding chapter to the first volume summarises trends already apparent: such as the growth of the public employment generally and of part-time and female employment in particular (the subject of a chapter in Volume 2). Unsurprisingly the main growth areas are education, health and in several cases personal social services. Those countries singled out for attention have greater interest: Germany's federal employees were halved in size over one decade due to 'privatisation' and unification; Denmark and Sweden displayed greater feminisation of the work force (about two-thirds), compared to 50% for most other countries.

The eight substantive chapters of the second volume present overviews and analysis of the key themes previously examined by country. The variations in official data from the various countries preclude systematic comparison for many purposes (for continuing discussion of

the complexities in Australia see Simon-Davies 2010). There are nevertheless numerous comparative insights, and suggestive hypotheses for further investigation. The consideration of employment and the organisation of tasks casts some light on the variations in how public sectors are constituted compared to private and third sectors, and which fields are important (Christensen and Pallesen). Other illuminating comparisons on specific themes include the shift from standard to part-time employment (Heinemann), the relationship between the civil service and society (Derlien and Rouban) and executive control of staffing the senior civil service (Christensen and Gregory).

Australian exceptionalism as a federal system is confirmed by the chapters on multi-level governance (Nelson) and regional government (Peters) which indicate that state and territory accounted for around 74% of total public employment compared to about half or less for other federal systems. Jon Pierre observes in his chapter on local government that their employees provide the army for the general staff of central government, except of course for Australia where local government is by far the smallest of the 10 countries surveyed with less than 10% of total public sector employment.

The limitation of the two volumes is that a project that commenced in 1994 was dated well before its publication date. The books essentially relate to the 1990s, the latest figures for some countries barely making it into the 2000s. Much of the discussion of New Public Management issues is now of more interest to administrative historians. This might not matter during a period of less turbulence, but the 2000s has been a decade of growth in public sectors, even those like Australia and the United States that were once among the smallest in OECD as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (and this is without taking into account the end of the decade financial and economic crisis). The editors seek to deflect the critique of the lack of up-to-date statistics by arguing that this is a pioneering exercise that will provide the basis for systematic research in this field. The editors can claim considerable success in achieving their objective of

producing 'the most extensive and directly comparable research on public employment' (Volume 1:15).

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Note

Simon-Davies, J. 2010. *How Many are Employed in the Commonwealth Public Sector?* Background Note, Parliamentary Library, 26 November 2010.